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DAAG-PAP-A (M) (21 Nov 72) DAFD-OTT

4 December 1972

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report: MG Wilburn C. Weaver,
Commander, 1st Signal Brigade, 1 May 1971 - 11 June 1972 (U)

SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. Reference: AR 525-14, Senior Officer Debriefing Program (U) 2 July 1971.
2. Transmitted herewith is the report of Major General Wilburn C. Weaver, subject as above.
3. This report is provided to insure appropriate benefits are realized from the experiences of the author. The report should be reviewed in accordance with paragraphs 3 and 5, AR 525-14; however, it should not be interpreted as the official view of the Department of the Army, or of any agency of the Department of the Army.
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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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SCCPV-CG

11 June 1972

SUBJECT: Senior Officer Debriefing Report

Commanding General
HQ USARV
ATTN: AVHGC-DST
APO 96375

1. (U) Senior Officer Debriefing Report for the 1st Signal Brigade USASTRATCOM for the period 1 May 1971 to 11 June 1972 is submitted pursuant to USARV Regulation 1-3, dated 1 June 1968.
2. (C) The period covered by this report was characterized by continued, sharp reductions in military strength, a corresponding increase in contract operations for communication services, continuing assumption of former 1st Signal Brigade communication missions by the ARVN Signal Department, and a major effort to retrograde Communications-Electronics equipment from South Vietnam. During this period the military strength was reduced from 14,400 to 3,000. Six signal groups and 12 signal battalions were inactivated. The number of signal sites in Vietnam and Thailand manned by the 1st Signal Brigade was reduced from 249 to 140.

PEOPLE

3. (FOUO) Personnel turbulence resulting from a continuous drawdown and reassignment of individuals from the various units, was perhaps the greatest problem with which I had to deal during the period of this report. Rarely was there a discontinuance of a complete area mission which would permit straightforward withdrawal of the unit in any given locale. Usually the process was one of steady reduction of an area mission, attrition of individuals performing the mission and eventual drawdown to zero strength. This resulted in small pockets of people in locations where companies

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had once been. Command and control was particularly difficult to exercise when a company headquarters had jurisdiction over these widely-scattered small groups, and a battalion headquarters was required to exercise control over an entire military region. I know of no other way in which the withdrawal could have occurred, but inherent in this method was an increase in the rate of morale, welfare and disciplinary problems. There was no occasion in which the Army command structure completely broke down. There were two occasions, at two remote mountain top sites, when command authority was dangerously close to disintegration.

4. (FOUO) In both instances the situation developed as follows:

- a. Military communicators were replaced by civilian contractors, but the requirement for soldiers to provide security for the site remained.
- b. The soldiers selected to perform the security mission were primarily infantrymen with a sprinkling of military policemen.
- c. The sites' security mission was largely one of static defense, occupying bunkers and guard towers, checking and replacing sensors and command detonated mines, and furnishing combat escort for resupply. In general it was a boring job which offered little challenge.
- d. Drugs were introduced into the sites by a variety of means and were widely used by the lower ranking enlisted men.
- e. Command authority eroded to the point where attempts on the lives of those in authority occurred.

5. (U) The lesson learned from this experience is that the current doctrine of manning remote signal sites with signal soldiers in sufficient numbers to permit these soldiers to carry out their communication mission while taking their turn in sharing the responsibility for site security is sound. This insures against the boredom of staring out into the valleys from a hilltop bunker, day after day, waiting for an attack which in these cases never materialized.

6. (U) On the whole the drawdown of military strength went well. It is my belief that I could not make that comment if I had been compelled to engineer this drawdown thru the ARMY AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENT SYSTEM (TAADS) alone. That system is not geared to respond to a situation of constant reorganization and strength change. However, because the strength

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was always being reduced, and there was rarely a requirement to add equipment, or occupational specialties, or people of higher grade, I was able to capitalize on what became known as the Brigade Authorization Documentation System. Aided by access to a computer, I was able to furnish each subordinate commander with a monthly print-out of a TOE which gave him his latest reduced authorization. Requisitions for personnel were based on this document rather than the TAADS. The TAADS submissions were regularly made but always lagged the real situation by several months.

7. (C) The concept that contractor personnel could widely supplant signal men in the hostile and difficult environment of Vietnam remained a questionable one during a large part of this period. The turnover in contractor personnel was even greater, at first, than it had been with soldiers on a 12-month tour. Many technicians hired by the contractor were disenchanted by the spartan life which their jobs entailed, and resigned almost as rapidly as they arrived. There were a few abortive attempts to stage organized walkouts to force higher pay as compensation for poor living conditions. There were those who resigned as soon as a rocket attack occurred anywhere in the vicinity of their work. These circumstances caused me to resort to the STRATCOM organization to produce a contingency plan for reintroduction of military communicators in the event of abandonment of sites by contractor personnel. The contingency plan, as approved and published, provides for STRATCOM organizations in the Pacific going on a seven day work week to free men immediately to report to Vietnam on temporary duty. Subsequently, if required, many of these men would be replaced by individuals and teams from the 11th Signal Group based at HQ USASTRATCOM.

8. (FOUO) Over the months contractor turbulence subsided. The contractor was about to recruit more stable individuals, although the cost of operation for these individuals steadily inched its way up and resulted in higher costs to the government. The situation had so improved by 30 March 1972, when the NVA launched a conventional, large-scale offensive against RVN, less than 1% of contractors in the field asked to be relieved.

CONTRACTOR PERFORMANCE

9. (FOUO) The contractor got off to a poor start in the spring of 1971. This was not entirely his fault. The government applied pressure to speed up the turnover process from soldier operation to civilian operation to the

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degree that chaos ensued over a period of approximately three months. As an example, certain key contractor people in the operation of an ICS site had a week's or less experience on the site before the soldiers were withdrawn. The situation deteriorated so badly, that a significant number of soldiers had to be reinstated in the operation to allow the contractor technicians an opportunity to learn their jobs. The government had failed to recognize that there were many tasks, such as computing a prescribed load list, which are peculiar to the military operation alone and for which the civilian electronics technician has had no opportunity to train.

10. (FOUO) The contract itself is a cost plus award fee contract, with the provision for monthly performance evaluation. Six months were required before the contractor performed well enough to earn any fee at all. By the anniversary date of the contract, performance had improved to a satisfactory level. Nevertheless, contractor responsiveness during night hours and over weekends has never matched that of the soldiers whom he replaced, and probably never will.

11. (FOUO) Some of the seeming deficiencies in contractor performance was caused by failure on the part of the government to furnish certain support satisfactorily. For example, all vehicles for contractor use were GFE. All maintenance for these vehicles was supposed to be furnished by the government. As units were inactivated in Vietnam, the motor pools and direct support maintenance shops which had previously kept these vehicles in operating order, often disappeared. At the worst point in time the deadline rate for GOCO vehicles in this contract approached 40%. Eventually the contract had to be expanded to permit the contractor to establish maintenance shops of his own.

12. (FOUO) On the other hand government support in at least one area was better than the contractor had any right to expect. Because of the excellent in-country airlift support, using aircraft organic to the 1st Signal Brigade, the contractor was able to make up his shortage in truly qualified technicians by rapidly moving an expert onto a site where inexperienced people were unable to clear a complex trouble.

13. (FOUO) Because of lessons learned in Vietnam, when this same contract was expanded to include installations in Thailand, the transition from military to contractor operation was smooth. In Thailand there was a programmed, extended overlap of contractor personnel and military personnel, and provisions were made from the outset for the contractor to be responsible for his own vehicle support.

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VIETNAMIZATION

14. (U) There are two separate courses for Vietnamizing the Army communication system in Vietnam. One course entails the turnover to the ARVN of the equipments and systems which are transportable and are generally referred to as tactical. There were never any really difficult problems in making this turnover. The equipments were programmed in prior years, manpower was scheduled through the ARVN Signal School, and as the trained manpower became available the changeover in operation of a large number of these systems was made from 1st Signal Brigade to the ARVN Signal Department. This part of the Vietnamization program is essentially complete.

15. (C) The more difficult turnover has been that of the fixed installations--- the ICS sites, the dial telephone exchanges, the direct distance dialing tandem switches, and the submarine cable heads. The training required to enable ARVN to repair and maintain these sophisticated equipments has been a long-term project. This fact has caused the intermediate step of contractor maintenance; that is, the US soldier is displaced by a contractor technician who in turn is displaced by an ARVN technician. It is only at this writing that real momentum has been generated in turnover of these fixed installations. Of 34 ICS sites, 11 have made the transition and the current rate of turnover is approximately three a month. Of the sixteen dial telephone exchanges, 10 have made the transition. It will not be until the fourth quarter FY 73 that the complete turnover will be made. Even then, in my judgement, a significant contract effort will be required to continue furnishing technical advice and assistance. However, it should be noted that this represents a two year improvement in the original schedule, drawn up in 1969, for making this transition.

RETROGRADE OF FIXED COMMUNICATIONS-ELECTRONICS MATERIEL

16. (U) Shortly before my predecessor was reassigned, there was created in the 1st Signal Brigade a provisional, company-sized unit called the Communication Asset Recovery Agency (CARA). During my tenure, the TDA for this organization was approved, and its performance was outstanding. Its mission was to move into those fixed installations which were not being Vietnamized, dismantle them, pack them, and ship them to other places in the world where they were required for reinstallation to serve US forces. This job often entailed the taking down of pre-engineered buildings, and packing associated air-conditioning and power-generating equipment. The electronics components, although small in bulk and weight, represent an extremely high dollar investment. CARA

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has in the past year recovered and shipped approximately 350 tons of fixed plant equipment valued at 55.9 million dollars. CARA assisted in the retrograde through USASTRATCOM channels of some 240 tons of cryptographic equipment costing 37 million dollars. The largest part of the job has been completed, and at this time the unit is scheduled to be inactivated and replaced by a smaller cell of contractor personnel.

COMMAND AND STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

17. (FOUO) As the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam progressed, there was an evolutionary change in the organization of the various Army command and control elements in the country. This in turn caused a periodic review of the Army Communications-Electronics support organization, on the supposition that there might be good reason for changing that organization also. One change envisioned, which had the attractive features of providing the regional commander with the command and control of all elements in his region and with providing him full control of the resources essential to his mission, was to transfer from the 1st Signal Brigade to the regional commander those subordinate elements of the brigade located in that region. However, closer inspection revealed that there were overriding, unattractive features in this proposition. These were:

a. The fracturing of an integrated communication system, which knows no regional boundaries.

b. The requirement for a large and separate pool of maintenance technicians in each military region, when one such pool under centralized control, using modest aviation resources, can serve the entire area of RVN. It is my view that the rationale which created the 1st Signal Brigade in 1966 has proven itself and continues to do so. This arrangement provides an integrated SEA communications system, centrally controlled, backed up by the resources of the entire USASTRATCOM organization, but under the operational control of the Army Commander in Vietnam.

SECURITY

18. (C) As I remarked earlier, the best way of ensuring site security at signal sites, is to man the sites with sufficient communicators who perform their communications job and take their turn in perimeter defense. However, as the withdrawal progressed in Vietnam, a point was reached where it was no longer possible to maintain sufficient strength at the site to do this.

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Eventually there was no uniformity in the way that site security was effected. In the delta, the tactical sites were taken over by the ARVN rather early in the withdrawal. The fixed sites were without exception located in province capitals, and were provided general security just by the presence of the ARVN units stationed there. Accordingly, site security really became "access control" and was performed by hired local nationals. At other sites throughout the country at the present time, site security is provided by US soldiers, Nung guards under the supervision of US soldiers, and by elements of the ARVN and RF/PF. An effort has been made to concentrate our dwindling military strength at those sites which are most critical to US military operations. Until such time as the Vietnamization process has resulted in the complete turnover of all sites to the ARVN regular forces, a considerable risk will exist. To some extent, this risk has always existed.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNICATIONS-ELECTRONICS SITUATION IN ARVN

19. (U) My successor will find that the communications situation below the regional assistance command (group) level is most austere. The advisors at province and division level are largely dependent on communications furnished by the ARVN. Beyond that they must rely upon their own low-level tactical radios, courier service, and single side band unsecure radio nets. In emergency they can and do call upon the 1st Signal Brigade to fly airborne radio relay missions which can extend the range of their secure, tactical FM radios a hundred miles or more.

Essential command and control communications for the major headquarters in-country, though reduced in quantity, are still maintained at a high level of reliability and quality; the difference now being that contractor personnel are the main operators of these facilities. Only in the most sensitive installations, such as the classified communication centers for the various headquarters, is the operation run solely by soldiers.

20. (FOUO) A complicated job remains for the incoming CG, 1st Signal Brigade. The reduction in force in the 1st Signal Brigade is continuing. His main problem will doubtlessly be the same as mine -- reducing the force without causing the organization to fall apart. To do this he will need the authority to select the individuals who can be relieved and sent out of the country. The drawdown has become so critical in the allocation of the right man to the right job that general policies for curtailing tours in RVN can no longer be applied. Such general policies, based solely upon the length of time a man has served in Vietnam, result in

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imbalances in specialties and grades. Hopefully, unexpected policies for Army-wide reductions in force, emanating from the headquarters DA, have served their purpose and will cease to be issued. These policy announcements in the past year (opportunities for early ETS to join reserve or Army National Guard units, to return to school, etc.) have caused sudden and unforeseen losses in manpower in the 1st Signal Brigade which in turn have, on occasion, caused the importation of individuals on temporary duty to meet mission requirements. For example, the program permitting individuals to volunteer for reserve units resulted in a loss of 364 men in a three-month period. Apart from being unprogrammed, this loss was made more painful because a disproportionate number of the individuals affected had occupational specialties associated with Communications Center operations -- specialties which were already acutely short.

21. (C) As my successor takes command, he will find that the 1st Signal Brigade has been reduced in strength to the point where there is essentially no reserve for contingencies. Recognizing this fact, CINCPAC has recently authorized the re-location of certain equipments, and a 100-man operating force, to Thailand to meet contingencies in Vietnam. These teams will be assigned to the Signal Brigade element located at Samae San, near the UTAPAO airbase, and should afford some flexibility in meeting requirements which continue to arise while the enemy maintains the pressure of his offensive. Hopefully, this reserve will have been constituted by 30 June 1972, the ending date for the current incremental drawdown. On the bright side, he will inherit an outfit which has weathered the storm of the most severe personnel turbulence and, aside from the possibility of a complete withdrawal of all US forces from RVN, should have relatively more stability hereafter. Further, the pattern for communications support in RVN for the future has been established and has been tested sufficiently to give a measure of confidence that it will work. However, in the current situation of extreme austerity, great dependence on contractor personnel, and an enemy who can elect to concentrate on the destruction of communications facilities, this "measure of confidence" is not great enough to warrant nor permit any complacency.

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